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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines outcomes-based education (OBE), focusing on the two widely differing jurisdictions of the Province of Alberta in Western Canada and the Republic of South Africa. The paper begins by explaining the nature of OBE, including the topics: principles and origin of OBE; research findings; resistance to OBE in the United States; levels of OBE; and a non-OBE test question from South Africa's "Matric" Examination. The paper continues with a description of Alberta's OBE curricula, describing its workplace-inspired plan, and stating that Alberta has a program of studies that exists on paper only. The paper closes with a description of South African OBE, concluding that South Africa has developed a sophisticated curriculum framework, but so far it lacks detail and is far from universal implementation. This portion of the paper also concludes that the administrative structures to be put in place for curriculum development are "breathtakingly ambitious" for a large and diverse country. (Contains 17 references.) (EF)

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by Laurie Walker

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A Diet of English Language Arts Outcomes: Alberta and South Africa

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Purpose of the Paper

A number of political jurisdictions in the English-speaking world have adopted the label, and in some cases the principles, of outcomes-based education in mandates to their educational authorities for the revision or reform of their official school curricula. The purpose of this paper is to examine critically two such outcomes-based curriculum implementations under way in two widely different jurisdictions: the Province of Alberta in Western Canada and the newly democratic Republic of South Africa. The expectation is that a comparison and contrast of the two curriculum structures , with special reference to subject English, will (a) clarify the nature of OBE as an abstract set of principles and philosophical choices which have to be adapted to particular socio-political contexts; and (b) reveal the compromises and adaptations that are made as curriculum "dietary regimes" are imposed upon particular historically evolved traditions of schooling.

Introduction

The Contexts: Alberta and South Africa

Alberta and South Africa are two unlike political entities. Alberta is a Canadian province of 3.5 million people, over 80% of whom live in the two major cities, Edmonton and Calgary. It enjoys a high level of economic prosperity based on oil and natural gas extraction, a dependence which the provincial government is attempting to reduce by making Alberta a favoured place for investment and industrial location through low taxes and a highly educated work force. Alberta's OBE orientation is linked to the political agenda of an education that is relevant to the needs of such a work force.

Alberta has a 94-year tradition of curriculum revision which occurs, subject by subject, on an approximately ten-year cycle. The most recent cycle, which began in 1993, is taking place in a politically right-wing climate in which a popular Conservative government has reduced educational spending and adopted public accountability, including accountability of schools and teachers, as a

prominent principle which meets with strong electoral approval. A four-year bachelor's degree in education is a requirement for teacher certification; many of Alberta's approximately 26,000 teachers have five or six years of academic and professional education.

Self-styled as the Rainbow Country, South Africa's population of 38 million people is made up of 76 per cent Africans, 13 per cent Whites, 9 percent Coloureds, and two per cent Indians. . In 1994 the country emerged from nearly a half century of *apartheid* (separate development) imposed by the Nationalist government in 1948. Nelson Mandela was elected President and the African National Congress party won the first democratic election in that year. The new government set about dismantling the laws and structures of the *apartheid* state, including the educational system. The old racially demarcated school systems were abolished and a single national department of education was put in place, responsible for educational policy, including curriculum, and the training and hiring of teachers. The nine provincial departments of education are responsible for implementing national policies. The highly centralized national system of education includes approximately 350,000 teachers, many of whom are not adequately qualified, especially those who teach in the former African school system. Compounding the challenge is the fact that the old African school system (the Department of Education Training) was under-funded during the *apartheid* era and teacher education in that system was deliberately impoverished. Under the ideology of "separate development," the Nationalist government's rationale was that each racial group needed an education best fitted to its role in the country. Africans, in many cases gathered into separate "homelands," often in unproductive areas of the country, needed, it was claimed, an education that prepared them for manual work in the mining and other industries and for lower level service to the dominant minority White population.

An additional issue that is relevant to the changes sought is that the revolt against *apartheid* from 1976 to 1994 turned the African schools into sites of the political struggle. Students and teachers in the African schools were politicized and schools were places of political opposition rather than of teaching and learning. The models and norms of professional teaching and respectful learning were lost. Many teachers, both in their own experiences as students and their practice as teachers have not encountered the "culture of teaching and learning." Curriculum reform, as part of the much larger reform effort to make education the transformational engine of the creation of a new South African civil society, is, in this context, and on a national scale, an enormous challenge. In Alberta the task is curriculum revision; in South Africa it is at least curriculum reform and probably curriculum revolution. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) is being used by both jurisdictions as a source of curriculum design ideas. Unfortunately, in South Africa, the planned changes are taking place at a time when the South African economy is not faring well: interest rates are high, the currency is down, unemployment is very high, and crime is rampant. Funds needed to properly assist the rebuilding are not available.

The Nature of Outcomes-Base Education

In the 1990's curriculum revision in Western and Eastern Canada, as well as educational reform in South Africa, has adopted principles from Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to direct the planning of new programs of study. At its simplest level, OBE starts at the end of the K-12 schooling process with the question, what should the graduates of the school system, at the point of graduation, know and be able to do? The answers to this question then shape the design and content of the curriculum as step-by-step learning experiences that lead to the exit outcomes. Students, parents and other stakeholders are informed about the nature of the general outcomes and the more specific grade-level outcomes. Continuous assessment is provided so that stakeholders can see progress being made and so

that learners and teachers can be held accountable for the achievement of the outcomes.

Principles of OBE

1. Establishing clarity of focus.

OBE starts with a definition of what the graduate of an educational system should know and be able to do. These exit outcomes direct the design of the curriculum, the instructional delivery system, and the assessment procedures. OBE, in its full sense, is much more than a curriculum revision.

2. Maintaining high expectations for all students.

Arising from OBE's roots in mastery learning, is its fundamental premise that time to learn is not a constant but a variable. That is to say that the amount of time a learner needs to master some concept, skill or attribute will vary according to capacity and opportunity. If that variability is provided, advocates of OBE believe that all students, under the right conditions, can learn . This principle stands in radical contrast to the usual organizing principle of public education that class time is fixed, in the form of the Carnegie unit, for example, and that achievement is variable. In other words, OBE rejects the Bell Curve distribution of achievement. OBE is thus concerned with expanding educational opportunities for all students.

The Origin of OBE

OBE had its genesis in one small school district in New York State, the school district of Johnson City. Over a period of two decades, starting in the 1960's, two superintendents led the district school system through a transformation of organization, curriculum, teaching, and school culture. The results were outstandingly successful judged by measures of student achievement such as standardized test scores, retention, and the rigorous New York Regents diploma which provides prestigious scholarships for higher education for grade 12 graduates.

By 1994 over 70 school districts in 20 U.S. states had adopted the Johnson City model of OBE, called the Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model (ODDM). Other versions of OBE have been adopted in 20 other states. In addition OBE has spread to other countries such as Canada, Australia and to countries in western Europe. Academic journals devoted to the study of OBE have been created ; network organizations share ideas and support its implementation; consultants have made a lot of money offering training to school districts.

Research Findings

The research base providing evidence of the impact of OBE on students' performances, except for the spectacular results from Johnson City, is, generally, anecdotal and small scale. The main tentative conclusions are:

1.implementation of OBE requires a restructuring of the entire educational system and requires a significant period of time;

2.performance improvements are more likely to be found in elementary classrooms than in secondary ones; and in smaller school districts than larger ones;

3.the more complete the implementation the greater will be the chance of improvement;

4.the effects are greater for low-achieving students than high achievers.

Resistance to OBE in the United States

O'Neil (1994) stated that the volume of rhetoric supporting OBE in the United States crested in 1992. As is the case with many educational panaceas or magic bullets, opposition has emerged and pressure groups have lobbied state legislatures and school boards to prevent and turn back OBE adoptions. Opposition has come from the fundamentalist Christian right who allege that the adoption of affective outcomes such as those related to the development of tolerance for cultural difference either encroaches on the rights of the family or counters the teaching of the Bible. Opposition has also come from the liberal middle classes who see OBE's objective that all students achieve the stated outcomes as an undermining of the quality and rigour of education which have not been barriers to their children's success. The effectiveness of this opposition to OBE in the United States has led to claims that, as in the case of other reforms in education, Canada is adopting methods that have already proven to be unsuccessful south of the border.

Levels of OBE

OBE means different things to different people. One dimension of difference has been analyzed by Spady (1994) into categories he called "Traditional OBE", "Transitional OBE" and "Transformational OBE," lying on a continuum of intended impact on the organization of learning in schools. The classification is also based on the level of significance of target outcomes. Spady (1994) defines learning outcomes as "high-quality, culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context." (p. 18) At one end of this scale Spady places conventional classroom learning which is internally referenced to the subject under study (traditional OBE). At the other end is a demonstration of learning that "respond[s] to the complexity of real-life performance contexts" (transformational OBE)(p. 19). These outcome demonstrations are externally referenced beyond the classroom to the real world.

Traditional OBE is concerned with discrete content skills linked to small segments of the curriculum subject. The outcome demonstrations are likely to be structured by the teacher. At this level of outcomes, the regular curriculum divided into the traditional subjects can be adapted to OBE without significant other change. An example of an outcome demonstration at this level would be the following specific outcome at the grade 10 level in Alberta:

> "express aspects of a [literary] work (such as the plot structure of a narrative text) using appropriate terminology (such as antecedent action, juxtaposition and focalizer." ,p.34
>
> Transitional OBE entails higher order demonstrations that are generalized across different subject areas and demand integration of content from those different disciplines. They are more likely to involve higher levels of independence. An example would be the following specific outcome at the grade 12 level:
>
> "analyze and explain ways in which language and images express and influence the values, behaviours, perceptions and lifestyles of individuals and groups (p. 105).

Transformational OBE involves "demonstrations of complex applications of many kinds of knowledge and competencies as people confront the challenges surrounding them in their social systems." (Spady, 1994, p. 21). Spady acknowledges that "to provide this level of learning will require a transformation of what schools are and how they spend their time." (p. 22). An example that approaches this level of outcome demonstration is an outcome at the grade 12 level related to the general outcome of managing ideas and information :

> Select, independently, information from multiple sources, sites and perspectives that will enhance understanding of text or contribute to text creation." p. (59)

A Non-OBE Test Question from South Africa's "Matric" Examination

The following question was included on the English First Language Higher Grade Third paper, English Literature in 1993. This was the "Matric" as it was called in South Africa, equivalent to the end-of-secondary-school British "A" Levels, or to the Canadian "Diploma Exam." The Matric dominated the old education syllabus, and it still exercises a potent influence. The question on Romeo and Juliet, is, in many ways, the antithesis of an outcomes assessment:

> "The tragedy of the play stems as much from the single-minded passion of the young lovers as it does from the rash impulsiveness of the minor characters who create a web of events and circumstances which entangle Romeo and Juliet. With the above in mind, discuss the factors which contribute to Romeo and Juliet being regarded as a tragedy of both character and circumstance."

This question is intended to assess achievement in literary study as a self-contained discipline. The arguments that an adequate answer would use are either internal to the play or to literary conventions and definitions ("tragedy of character" and "tragedy of manners," for example) that constitute the formal discipline of literature. Assessment questions such as this indicate that mastery of the disciplines, which "represent human achievements of significance" was the underlying premise of the old curriculum in South Africa as it was in many other jurisdictions.

Outcomes-based education, on the other hand, references education externally to goals and purposes that lie beyond the school, the syllabus, and school subjects. The starting point is often some definition of the qualities of an ideal, or better society. In South Africa, for example, the outcomes-based curriculum to be implemented by 2005, is driven by a vision of a new post-apartheid society in which racial tolerance and equality are valued and practised. It is also driven by the economic goals of the nation to be competitive in world markets based on a skilled work force that is, through lifelong learning, adaptable to rapid changes in the nature of work. Out of this vision is derived a set of externally referenced answers to the question: "what do I want my learners to know, be able to do, value and be like." ,p.6

Alberta OBE

In December, 1993 the ministers of education of the four western provinces and of the Yukon and Northwest Territories signed the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education. This agreement to work together in basic education was committed to four goals: high standards, common

goals, removal of inter-jurisdictional obstacles to access and transfer, and optimal use of educational resources. The joint planning committees charged with drawing up framework documents in the basic subjects, language arts, math, social studies, and science , were given two mandates by their respective deputy ministers to guide their work: to produce outcomes-based curriculum frameworks and to provide specific outcomes for each grade level.

Other than the four goals listed above, the Western Protocol partners did not commit to a vision of the well educated graduate. On the other side of the country, there was more explicitness. Atlantic Canada, in a parallel curriculum development project for the four Eastern provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, did define a set of six "essential graduate learnings." These related to citizenship, personal development, communication, problem solving, technological competence, and aesthetic expression. The last, which included literature as a form of the arts, was stated as:

> Graduates will be able to respond with critical awareness to various forms of the arts and be able to express themselves through the arts. (p. 19)

The Atlantic Canada Foundation Document also included a vision statement for the English Language Arts Curriculum:

> The Atlantic Canada English language arts curriculum is shaped by a vision of enabling and encouraging students to become reflective, articulate, literate individuals who use language successfully for learning and communicating in personal and public contexts (p. 1).

The Western Protocol Framework document spoke of the English language arts Curriculum Framework as being designed to prepare students for "present and future language requirements"...."to meet new literacy requirements in Canada and the international community. ....and, through language, "to experience personal satisfaction and to become responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners ." (p. vii)

However, the most important answer, not explicitly stated in the Framework document, is revealed in its organization into learning outcomes. In these two administrative mandates reside implicit statements about the most worthy knowledge in English language arts: it was that which could be stated in demonstrable outcomes that are clear enough for students, parents, teachers and the general public to understand. Such outcomes, it was claimed, have the support of metacognitive learning theories which maintain that students' own awareness of their learning needs, strengths and weaknesses facilitates their learning.

The outcomes framework was much influenced by the provincial government's business agenda. While the Framework document was a starting point for the curriculum revisions, they were also guided by the Alberta government's three-year business plans that each government department is required to make public and revise every year. The three-year business plan for 1996 to 1999 listed as Alberta Education's first goal for improving education:

> "Focus education on what students need to learn; ensure that high standards are established, communicated and achieved." , p. 7

The first strategy to achieve this goal was:

> "Establish and communicate clear learning outcomes and high standards for basic education." (Government of Alberta, 1996)

Goal 9, "Ensure that the education system is open and accountable" (p. 18), depends, at least partly, on clear learner outcomes. Achievement of the outcomes can be assessed by mandatory provincial examinations; parental and public satisfaction can be gauged by surveys; and the overall score card can be published annually. In other words, one managerial motive for an outcomes-based curriculum is to make schools and teachers accountable for their students' learning.

Another belief involved in the drive for an outcomes-based curriculum is the importance of the work place as a destination for the graduates of the public schools system, either directly from high school or via post secondary education The outcomes defined are intended to benefit the individual as a future member of society and as a citizen; but they are also intended to meet the needs of that society through the preparation of productive citizens ready to enter the workplace, either directly or via further education beyond high school. The Framework's endorsement of a wide range of texts to develop skills in functional reading and writing and of technology-based texts is linked to the influence on curriculum of workplace needs.

The 1990's have seen a number of reports from employer groups setting out the skills that workers need in the workplace . The conclusion of these reports came in response to a popular concern that schools in Canada and the United States had lost touch with the workplace.

However, the organization of a curriculum framework around clear learning outcomes did not derive solely from business and government. Professional English language arts educators around the English-speaking world had developed a consensus that clearly stated learning outcomes were important in education. One manifestation of this consensus was the outcome of a five-year project in the United States, sponsored jointly by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. In 1996, after broad consultation involving hundreds of their members, these two professional organizations published an influential and comprehensive listing and explanation of curriculum standards for the English language arts to guide curriculum development and practice. The term "standards" corresponds closely to, "learning outcomes".

Standards were definitions of "what students should know about language and be able to do with language." (p.1) Professional educators, in other words, in the United States and in many other English-speaking countries had converged on the belief that curriculum, including English language arts, should be structured around the desirable and demonstrable accomplishments of learners resulting from programs of instruction. There was a consensus shared by the critics of education and the professional educators on the need to define curriculum in English language arts as learner-centred outcomes. Critics saw clear outcomes as the solution to declining standards, while the professionals saw them as a way to meet escalating literacy expectations and needs in a complex, technological, knowledge-based society.

The Western Canadian Protocol Framework for English Language Arts clearly emerged from this consensus. In some respects, notably in the parallel addition of the language art, "representing", the

Framework and the IRA/NCTE standards document, were similar in intent. The Framework presents English language arts as a two-dimensional matrix, one dimension of which consists of the five general outcomes that guide instruction from K-12. The other dimension is the six modalities, or language arts, through which communication operates: speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and representing. These two dimensions are built into the form of the five General Outcomes, as the common stem: "Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to...".

What kind of OBE has Alberta adopted? It is not transformational in the sense that Spady described for it maintains the school subjects as separate curriculum areas. It is not a full-scale reorganization of education as Fitzpatrick described in her principles. It does not set out a long period of time for the implementation as successful implementations have required in the United States literature. As far as assessment is concerned, there is much work to be done. The Draft Program of Studies for High School sets out the curriculum standards in terms of what students must know and be able to do at the end of secondary education. Still to be developed are the assessment standards, or the demonstrations that will indicate that the required knowledge and skills have been acquired, as well as the achievement standards that define the levels of performance. So far Alberta has a program of studies that exists on paper.

OBE South Africa

The reform of South African education is still under way. In many cases the reforms exist as plans on paper at the national level, without many of the details worked out and with little implementation at the school level. The scope and scale of the reform task are immense. There are approximately 350,000 teachers in South Africa, many of whom, especially in schools that were formerly part of the African system, are unqualified or under-qualified. A 1997 survey of schools showed that 24% of schools in the country as a whole did not have a supply of water available within walking distance; 67% did not have a power supply; thousands lacked toilets and telephones. Student work tops (desks), teachers' chairs and storage cupboard were inadequate in nearly half of all schools.

The main features of the reforms planned are:

> ***Infrastructure*** - replacing the old 19 separate departments of education (based on four racial categories (Africans, Whites, Indians and Coloureds) with a single national department of education, responsible for policy, curriculum, and employment of teachers, and nine provincial, departments responsible for policy implementation. This replacement has occurred but it is questionable that the change has had any major impacts on teaching and learning at the classroom level.
>
> ***Funding Equity*** - achieving a more equitable allocation of financial and human resources to all schools, replacing the deliberately racial disparities of the apartheid era, in which, for example, the pupil-teacher ratio in white schools could have been as low as 20:1, while in African schools it could reach 80:1. Great disparities continue to exist among schools. Redress has not yet been achieved.
>
> ***Curriculum*** - dismantling the old racist syllabus, with its emphasis upon central authoritarian control, rote academic learning, and an overwhelmingly important examination system, culminating in the "Matric", the grade 12 subject examinations that

determined the post-secondary opportunities for students and the reputation of schools and teachers. Since the new curriculum is still in the planning phase, the old syllabuses continue to be used. Students still write the "Matric."

In this challenging social and economic environment, the Department of Education has embarked on an ambitious transformational curriculum reform. By the year 2005, the plan is to have a new outcomes-based curriculum developed and implemented at all grade levels. The target is a curriculum that is outcomes-based in its most radical sense. In Spady's terms, the intention is to have a transformational OBE curriculum.

Curriculum 2005 is the Governments' new curriculum framework for the first ten years of schooling leading up to a General Certificate of Education and Training. It attempts to outline a shared vision of what kind of future faces the young people of this country, as well as set down the knowledge, skills and values young people will need in order to participate fully and actively in shaping this future. It envisages a nation whose citizens are equipped to take their place as active members of a society that is progressive, just, democratic, and internationally competitive.

First of all, to foster integration of learning, the old discrete school subjects will be replaced by eight "learning areas," named as:

1. Languages, Literacy and Communication.
2. Human and Social Sciences.
3. Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences.
4. Life Orientation.
5. Technology.
6. Natural Sciences.
7. Arts and Culture.
8. Economics and Management Sciences

English, or English language arts, does not appear as a single subject but is placed in a larger category that includes the study of the other official languages, Africaans and the African languages, Xhosa, Zulu, North Sotho, Sesotho and Tswana.

The outcomes-based curriculum framework starts with a number of "critical, crossfield learning outcomes, each following the stem, "South Africa needs citizens who can:"

1. Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.
2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, or organization.
3. Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
4. Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information.
5. Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills in various modes.
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environments and the health of others.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

In addition, a further 5 statements were made about the need for learning programs to encourage

learners to

1. Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively.
2. Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities.
3. Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.
4. Explore education and career opportunities
5.Develop entrepreneurial activities.

As far as the learning area, Languages, Literary and Communication, is concerned, a set of 7 specific outcomes have been developed:

1.Make and negotiate meaning and understanding;
2.Show critical awareness of language use;
3.Respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts;
4.Access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations;
5.Understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context;
6.Use language for learning;
7.Use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

South Africa has developed a sophisticated curriculum framework, but so far it lacks detail and is far from universal implementation. Curriculum 2005 is complex, technical and a very sharp break with the past in which teachers have developed their expertise and practice. The teaching force includes many poorly qualified teachers who have not had experience of successful teaching, given the political turmoil that has affected schools over the past 20 years. Most rural teachers' immediate needs are much more basic than a new curriculum: water, electricity, toilets, classroom furniture, adequate buildings with space for large classes, textbooks and supplies. As one Free State head teacher told a visiting Canadian delegation in January, 1999, "we don't find district office staff coming to this school very often; they find it too depressing."

Jansen , in a recent critique of OBE in South Africa, has argued that Outcomes-Based Education "needs highly qualified and theoretically sophisticated, imaginative teachers. Without them the new curriculum will be applied in a mechanical way which would be the old system in disguise. Jansen (1997) also criticized the new curriculum for being jargon-laden, and he predicts that it will further accentuate the gulf between well resourced schools staffed by competent teachers and poor schools since more competent teachers will be better able to adjust to the new culture of teaching and learning. Perhaps Jansen's most serious criticism, however, was that the National Department of Education was ignoring the international experience with curriculum reform generally: that it is a slow process in which teachers need a lot of help in professional development; without that help, there is a risk that this curriculum reform could undermine the already fragile learning environment in South African schools and classrooms. The research on the effects of OBE implementation in the United States, quoted above, would bear out Jansen's fear.

The legislative framework for the nation-wide curriculum is provided by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which is to be administered by the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA). It is proposed to establish a Record of Learning for each learner, as he/she proceeds through or part way through the 8 levels of the NQF. General education or training comprises the first level consisting of grades 1-7 and Adult Basic Education and Training , Levels 1-4. Further Education and Training

comprises high school or equivalent consisting of Levels 2-4. Higher Education and Training includes diplomas, first degrees, higher degrees and doctoral and research degrees, Levels 5-8.

SAQA is responsible for setting up National Standard Bodies (NSB) for each of the learning areas: An NSB will be responsible for identifying sub-fields of learning within each field and for setting up a Standard-Generating Body (SGB) for each sub-field. The SGB is responsible for generating standards and qualifications at different levels within that sub-field. Another set of organizations will be charged with accrediting providers of education and training at each of the NQF levels and moderating standards across different providers. These are Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQA's). This complex system of curriculum development would ultimately produce units of learning through which a learner could progress by demonstrating achievement of the outcomes of particular sequences of units. A learner's Record of Learning will list units and levels achieved.

Not only is Curriculum 2005 complex and technical, but the administrative structures to be put in place to develop its content, learning outcomes, assessments, accreditations and record of qualifications from kindergarten through to doctoral study are breathtakingly ambitious for a large and diverse country. South Africans are courageous planners and policy writers; the test will be at the classroom level.

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